RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE JEWISH CENTER AND JEWISH CENTER WORKER

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THE social responsibility of any institution is a result of (1) the events which led to its creation; (2) the kind of institution it is; (3) the setting in which it operates; (4) the personnel, volunteer or professional, who carry out its objectives; and (5) the group to whom its services are being offered; and (6) the manner in which it is being financed.

The Events Which Led to the Creation of Today's Jewish Center

The settlement movement, concerned with the elevation of the deprived through neighborhood organization and neighborhood cooperation, developed in the 1880's.

During this same period the Jewish center, in the form of Young Men's Hebrew and Literary Associations, was being conceived. Its origin was somewhat different. During the late 1880's, a time of social and economic expansion in America, American Jewry was made up primarily of Western European Jews of the middle and upper classes. They developed for themselves a series of Young Men's Hebrew and Literary Associations which were in the form of clubs, libraries, literary, and cultural groups. These associations were used to meet the need for organized association and action on issues of group interest. Benjamin Rabinowitz, in describing the growth of the YMHA movement, indicated that the first formal organization of Jews outside of the synagogue and benefit societies were these literary clubs, largely limited to men and primarily cultural in scope and purpose. This movement was identified with the Liberal and Reformed Judaism despite the fact that it was outside of the synagogue. It was "the lecture series" era with deep concern for Jewish education and Hebrew literature for adults and children. It paralleled the developments in the emerging YMCA, being largely secular in spirit and cultural in content. Both institutions justified themselves as expressions of the unique cultural and ethnic differences which made them separate groups.

While these developments were going on, under the impetus of the Charity Organization Society movement, the synagogue ladies aid societies, the social welfare agencies of their time, were merging into the United Hebrew Charities. This federated form of community organization was developing with the social welfare services for Jews being given by a series of agencies of the

Jewish community within the American community. These Jewish agencies tended to supplement governmental services, rather than to replace them. "The bonds to religious grouping are casual with the Jewish agencies confronted with the same set of problems and issues as private agencies generally," Mr. Rabinowitz concluded. The early "Y" Literary groups were not considered part of the social welfare scene.

Under the impact of the social changes —the mass migration from over-populated Europe and the escape from the militarism of the "old country"— America found itself with a need to develop new kinds of institutions. In the period from 1880 to 1920, all the people in the United States were faced with the problem of absorbing foreigners, with strange customs, languages, values, religions.

American Jewry found itself being inundated by a great number of rural and semi-rural Eastern European Jews of a lower socio-economic status and with tremendous problems of economic, social, and cultural adjustments—the orthodox majority with set patterns and customs to whom the American way of life was almost indigestible, and the socialistic, non-religious Yiddishists who organized mutual benefit welfare services and sought to preserve these cultural values.

The literary clubs tried to retain their "hochkulture" characteristic and at the same time were forced to become an agency of Americanization with philanthropic and social service functions. In some cases where the differences were too great, with the help of the National Council of Jewish Women, other Jewish institutions were developed—settlement houses, neighborhood centers, educational alliances, girls' and boys' clubs for Jews. The librarian, the original professional of the Literary "Y," was supplemented in the new institutions by the educator, the rabbi, the athlete, the welfare worker, or the member of the old family who wanted "to do for" people.

It was during this period that some of the problems developed which are part of the Jewish center heritage and are still unresolved today: (1) The "melting pot" idea of reducing all differences to a uniform "American" pattern as against the idea of "cultural pluralism." (2) The concept of the advantaged few having a responsibility to do for the many underprivileged versus the idea of the total Jewish community sharing in the responsibility for all. (3) The concept of the center as a non-sectarian service in philosophy and program sponsored by a sectarian group as contrasted to the Jewish center as a symbol of Jewish identification dedicated to support the values and culture of Jewish people within the American community. (4) The Jewish center as a private membership association as contrasted with the Jewish center as a social agency.

The services of the Jewish institutions, which were later to be merged into the Jewish center, ranged from public-type baths, milk stations for children and mothers, cooking classes and instruction in balanced diets, trade schools and vocational placement, health examinations and treatment clinics, housing placement—to protection against flagrant violations and social injustices. Nor was culture neglected—dramatics, art, dance, music and creative arts were amply provided. Recreation and competitive athletics, including the manly arts of boxing and wrestling, were all encouraged.

During the period from 1920 to 1940, we saw both a total curtailment of immigration and phenomenal economic gains made by American Jews. During the first half of this period the YM and

YWHA's became institutionalized and visible through a building program. The synagogue, the primary institution of the Jewish religious group, shared in this growth and tried to recapture those services which would re-establish it as the central force in the Jewish community. During this period, "the synagogue-center" concept developed in this country. Since there was enough money and problems for both, there was no real conflict between the two Jewish institutions. It was as true then as it is today. The Jewish Welfare Board emerged, grew and became a national coordinating and resource force. It gave service to both the centers and the personnel, affecting the standards of practice which were becoming professionalized.

The depression ended the building spree. People learned that a person could work hard and yet be unable to cope with forces greater than himself. It was not sinful to have neither food nor rent money, and no one was so secure, so protected, or so powerful that he might not be subjected to a social investigation before getting help. Mass unemployment created massive social problems. Because of the desperation to find ways to be helpful to people, all kinds of institutions jumped on the bandwagon of social work. It was necessary to provide a group of paid practitioners, as the voluntary army could not keep up with the needs either in skill or in volume of work. Schools of social work recruited and trained practitioners for casework practice and a new specialization, social group work. These recruits for the schools of social work were by and large young, eager people who had experienced a depression. They were of the lower economic group, in the main. They had more educational opportunities because vocational opportunities were lacking. They were politically left of center and were devoted to "making the world a better place in which to live." *They were to their decade what the religious reformers were to the later 1880's.* Training gave the practice a professional look and agencies were competing for these services.

The Jewish centers, YM and YWHA's, etc., were quick to hire the newly trained practitioners. Some centers hired group workers because it was fashionable; others, because they realized the validity of helping people through group activity and experiences.

Before the depression was through, the rise of Hitlerism united the Jewish group, in spite of all differences. The stabilization of the American Jewish community, because of the lack of new immigrants and the years of living in the American dream, also tended to develop a common meeting ground.

This stabilization resulted in the merger of institutions like the Jewish Boys' Clubs, Jewish Girls' Clubs, Jewish settlement houses, into the institution known primarily as the YM and YWHA with some movement towards the incorporation of the term Jewish center. Efforts were made to define the program of these recreation-informal education group work institutions, at the NAJCW Conference in Pittsburgh in 1940, but since all of these "Y's" and centers had not moved at the same pace, a definitive statement could not be produced. Some "Y's" were private membership clubs, while others were aggressive social agencies concerned with social change.

The drive toward unity within the Jewish community was accentuated by the outbreak of World War II. The war's effect was to unify all Americans and it had special meaning for minorities—always uncomfortable in national emergencies. For the duration of the war, and following it, YM and YWHA's actually became the center of activities for the Jewish community's war en-

deavor, and provided many needed services to people who turned to it. Unemployment disappeared. Women were recruited for jobs in industry; mothers made arrangements for their children in day care centers and nursery schools, worked all day, and volunteered at the youth and young adult canteens at night. The two-pay-check family became the vogue. The programs of the Jewish centers were involved with the consequential problems of living, and were used by the Jewish community and the non-Jewish community as well. Everyone was involved in the program of the center.

Several factors need to be noted. (A) With more people involved in its many activities, the Jewish center expanded its committee and board structure. The Jewish center broadened the policy forming group to include a wider representation. (B) The war focused the new information from the scientific fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology, giving a broader scientific basis for understanding people. (C) Social work tended to become "individual-problem" oriented (therapeutic) rather than "community-problem" oriented, and the previous emphasis on changing the environment was given up in an effort "to manipulate" the individual to adjust to society. (D) The economic gains made in wartime, coupled with the truly emotional appeal of the overseas rescue needs, enabled the Jewish fund-raising groups to advance their recorded, community collections from $5,000,000 in 1936, to $125,000,000 by 1946. While most of this was used overseas, there was a large enough increase in funds to greatly develop the local community's Jewish social welfare services. (E) With the creation of Israel as a recognized independent state, world Jewry had a positive unifying force to substitute for the negative unity of the war period. All segments of Jewish community found something that they could be proud of in the new state.

After the war, the self-enforced cooperation experienced a post-war reaction with an immediate withdrawal from community-wide efforts to religious, racial, and class groups in America. Civil liberties, the Four Freedoms which had been a unifying force during the war became suspect with the cold war. Many efforts were made by socially conscious institutions to stem this force, but insecurity and fear made it a time of unenlightened self-interest.

This brings us to the present. Let us now look at our present "Jewish center," descendent of the "Y" Literary Society, the settlement house, the Jewish Boys' Club. It is only by analyzing and understanding this history against today's changing scene that we can begin to see the responsibility of the Jewish center and the people who work within its framework.

The history makes us aware that the development of the Jewish center paralleled the development of the field of social work. It, too, battled for a democratic structure, for adequate financing and for the evolvement of a liberal philosophy. The Jewish center was not the product of a considered intellectual process; it was the result of adjusting institutions and theories to current situations in which powerful social and economic forces were at play. The ability of the Jewish centers to modify their services, methods of operation and evolve a philosophy in keeping with the times resulted in compromises and frustrations. However, it did produce a vital group of agencies which carry the standards of group work practice in many communities. The history for me shows how much we have in common with the other social work agencies of religious origin.

Part of the difficulty of describing the social responsibility of the Jewish

center comes from the fact that the term "Jewish center" describes some centers which are social work oriented; some, which are pure recreational programs; some, which are no more than expanded health clubs; and some, which are religious centers. How can one make any general statement about such diverse types? Part of the difficulty also comes from the fact that the Jewish center is an evolving "uniquely American" institution, taking its special characteristics from its own particular history, its membership, and clientele, with an infinite variety of adaptations at any given moment.

To solve this difficulty I have selected to discuss those centers which are social work oriented.

One of the common significant factors is that for some reason, professionally trained social group workers have been hired and are continually being sought to provide the "core" function of many centers. Often it merely means that a social group worker finds himself hired as the administrator of a large operation. In many of the agencies, however, with program directors and department heads also social work trained, it would seem that in selecting this type of personnel the center has committed itself to the implications of the social work profession.

There is a lack of clarity and understanding of what is involved in hiring a professional (sometimes this lack of clarity is a mutual lack). Often there is ambivalence regarding the need for social work skill for their own children and/or families. Community currents, prescribing what is right to do or think, are constantly shifting. Fund raising difficulties and many other factors have often separated the professional and the board member on what social responsibilities are involved. Sometimes the reverse—the very closeness between board and staff—has created the same difficulty. Often workers on the administrative level have interpreted acquiescence and "close harmony" by a few "key" board members as acceptance of what the center worker represented. A few board members have become converted into "semi-professionals," with what sometimes seems to be the same sense of social work as the professional. Frequently, this turns out to be merely an attempt on the part of both the professional and the board member to hide the awful truth—that the worker is there to help with the social adjustment of the members; and the board member is there to be helped to use his time more effectively and more satisfyingly in accomplishing the center's objectives, in meeting the needs of the community he is serving and his own needs. Perhaps, if the tools of the professional group worker, namely group membership, social relationships, social activities, were not such every-day-garden-variety kinds of things, explaining what the professional brings to the job would not be so difficult.

The Jewish center professional has in common with his counterpart in the CYO program, the YWCA worker, or the practitioner in the glamorized therapeutic setting, membership in the profession of social work. While this does not have the same connotation as membership in the American Medical Association would imply, it does mean that there is a code of ethics. There is an orientation to people which transcends the specific setting in which he operates. There is a method of work backed by a body of knowledge which, when reduced to the "atom," gives him a reason for being the worker, as opposed to the board member or client. It is not superior educational attainment—or even a greater sensitivity to Jewish or social issues—or even a superior understanding of individual behavior, that gives

the worker his role (we have too many psychiatrists on our boards today).

It is an old truism, but we do need more and better interpretation of our profession, especially when we have an employees market, and communities want to hire us right and left.

What professional service has the Jewish center board secured for itself when it hires professionally trained social group workers?

It has hired professionals of the only completely socially-oriented profession —social work. As stated by Harry Lurie in an article in *New Horizons in Social Work:*

> Other professions have more limited areas of accountability. The clergy to the hierarchy of the church with no direct responsibility outside of its own membership; the lawyer is limited by tradition and statute and the Bar Association does not attempt to define his community responsibilities. The doctor, state licensed, has his ethical codes which have been established by his professional association; but his responsibility to the community is a secondary consideration to his responsibility to his patient as demonstrated in his attitudes. Even the teacher, who has a wider responsibility, does not usually become involved in problems of other social institutions or economic organizations. The public interest—or the welfare of the public—is a distant, not a direct, influence on the practice of most professions . . . contemporary social work reflects the social order of which it is a part and is in turn one of the factors in its development.

Mr. Lurie's statement needs little clarification on my part—only some underlining. Because the board that hires a professional of this type must realize that they have more than a skillful technician. There are hiring a professional who, because he is concerned with the groups and the individual Jews who use the center, is also concerned about the community in which they operate, the welfare of the public, and the total social order. He must be concerned about this setting because it is to this setting that he helps people work out their adjustment. So, for example, problems of people in regard to compulsory military training, housing in the inner city and split levels in the new diaspora, vocational opportunities in the face of automation, discrimination (religious or racial), mental and physical health resources are not areas in which the board authorizes the professional to spend time, but are areas for which the professional Jewish center worker can be held accountable. The Jewish center worker has an obligation to attempt to affect this social setting through the appropriate avenues available to him. He is effective when his activity is related to the problems of the individuals and groups with which he is working. He is most effective when the Jewish center recognizes the social orientation of his profession. It is the worker's responsibility to continually interpret this to the board. *The center has hired practitioners who are concerned with the social adjustment of the individual and who should be able to help people "achieve responsible behavior through group adjustment."* In Helen Phillips' introduction to *Achievement of Responsible Group Behavior,* she comments that:

> "The training of the two years is focused on the professional role of helping, in which the student can find his own role in enabling group members to carry responsibility consonant with the function of the group and with their part in the group.
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> "As a member of a group, the individual struggles to maintain what is his unique self. But if he is to maintain his membership in the group, he is required to find his place in relation to the whole group; he must take on some accountability to the group as a whole. In this relationship to the group he is called upon to accept, too, some part of the group's connection with the outside.
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> "These external pressures touch the individual group member in concrete forms. . . . It is the process of meeting and using these external forces that individual and group movement are precipitated. It is through the group work process that the individual may identify

> experience and carry responsibility in proportion to his feeling of the whole and his part of it.
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> "The professional factor in the group work process through which responsible behavior may develop is the worker. His concerns are the movement of the group within the external forces and, at the same time, the movement of the individual within the group."

Ashley Montagu, in *Being Human,* makes the point that the individual is first concerned about himself but almost instantly recognizes that his own being is dependent on others. In order to be and survive, he exchanges self-interest for something further—responsibility to the group. In the much quoted *Lonely Crowd,* David Reisman makes quite a point of the "group directed" individual who has substituted group conformity for social responsibility. This argues well for the need to provide social group work service to more than therapeutic groups, so that the group may serve the individual, not the individual be submerged by the group.

Can group workers really believe that conformity can long substitute for social responsibility? Conformity, when interpreted as giving up one's own individuality, is a surrender of self and must breed insecurity because there is no basis for the attitude of the behavior which is assumed. Yet it is a part of the maturing process. But in today's world, it must be still true that to the degree to which an individual takes responsibility for his share of the common good, to that degree, that person is a responsible and adjusted person, even and especially in the eyes of his peers.

Too many of us are concerned about our failure to take drastic action on highly sensitized legislation . . . we feel we have lost our "social action" drives. It was easier in the old days for all social workers and the Jewish center workers to work on vital social legislative programs when the clientele served were the disadvantaged group—lower economic, lower educational attainment. We are still able to function in the old way in the narrow area of work with the elderly and in some metropolitan areas where the "poor" Jew is not yet a museum piece. When the clientele changes, and it has changed to an observable degree, both economically and educationally the problems become more complex.

We have confused acting socially responsible with having a position on discrimination, public housing, health insurance, or on any one of the current social issues. There is a real difference between having "a position" and acting responsibly within the center, especially in the middle of a changing neighborhood. Having a resolution written doesn't always help when your board has to decide whether to relocate; what to do with the fifty-year-old building which is now in the heart of a Negro or Puerto Rican community; what responsibility it has to the fixed group of old Jews who are forced to stay in the same community due to a combination of circumstances. While it is impossible for one to make up rules on the position that should be taken on the check list of liberal legislation, it should not be difficult for a responsible social worker to help the board and clientele realistically tackle the implications of problems which directly affect them and the total community of which they are a part.

In the March issue of the *British Association of Residential Settlements,* Toynbee Hall's publication, a writer observes, "It is useless to try and run clubs for difficult young people (and which young people aren't) unless adequate, experienced staff and the right equipment are available." This is a professionally responsible statement. Acting socially responsible would mean that we would interpret what we are doing in our agencies for what it really

is. We would not pretend that work with groups, or group contacts were "social group work." We would eliminate groups, not on the basis that the service wasn't needed, but because adequately trained adults, either professionally trained or volunteers who are supervised, were not available to provide the skill necessary to help in the adjustmental process of the individual group members . . . or perhaps we would take more limited objectives for our agencies. *Socially responsible professionals would control their interpretation of service so that it keeps pace with the practice.*

The Jewish center as an institution is socially responsible when it recognizes its function, method, and objectives and works together with other Jewish institutions for the common good rather than sets out to compete and take over legitimate functions of special groups or institutions. The Jewish centers today need not usurp the role of any other organization in the Jewish community, to have a legitimate function.

The Jewish center that considers social group work its core function will give its members the framework in which they can develop healthy social attitudes, experience in solving problems and opportunities for leadership with group membership. It will supply a structure and will permit it to be used to solve the problems of its members. It will be a place where social responsibility is not a special area roped off for special observance but it is a part of its every-day activity, ever-exposed.

The professionally trained social group worker of today needs to constantly seek to perfect his practice to his greatest capacity. Helen Phillips, again in *Achievement of Responsible Behavior Through Group Work Process,* points out the pendulum swing in professional maturation:

"From wanting to take total responsibility for what happens in the group he leads to the other extreme of denying responsible behavior of the worker in an effort to let group members carry responsibility for themselves."

The fluttering of the student is not finished when graduation comes. Dr. Nate Cohen, in a recent meeting I attended, said:

"It is this taking over and giving back of responsibility which belongs to groups, boards of management, which has given us voluntary agency professionals a bad name in the very communities we have tried to help. Too often, we have been caught in the 'manipulations of do-good!' "

The professional must permit evaluation of his work and constantly seek better ways of doing it himself. The battle for the dollar will not suddenly let up; nor will the conflict between social work, education, religion, and culture suddenly disappear. An earnest attempt to permit the Jewish community to decide for itself is the responsibility of every professional. We must think of ways of measuring of accomplishment. We have ourselves accepted and have permitted others to accept attendance statistics to measure that complex thing—the contribution Jewish centers have made to the security of the American Jew.

The reform movements of the 19th Century were conscious attempts to restore what had been lost in the previous sixty years when people moved from the farms to the cities under the pressure of the industrial revolution. Social work evolved in this period. It has traditionally spent all its energies correcting errors committed in the past or supplementing the after-effect of changes over which it seemingly had no control. A socially responsible professional should look ahead at the changes which are, or are about to be, taking place and work towards effecting these changes so that society and the individual are guaranteed at least as important a place in the complex scene as the electric computer or the IBM master brain.